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Substantive session of 2003

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 10 July 2003, at 10 a.m.

President:	Ms. RASI (Vice-President)	(Finland)
later:	Mr. HUSSEIN (Vice-President)	(Ethiopia)

CONTENTS

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS:

(e) ENVIRONMENT

(h) INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN TAX MATTERS

CONSIDERATION OF THE REQUEST FOR CONVERSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE ORGANIZATION, AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION WITH OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, TO A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

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CONTENTS (continued)

NEGOTIATION OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION TO CONSTITUTE IT AS A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: (continued)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE COUNCIL (continued)

In the absence of Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala), Ms. Rasi (Finland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: (agenda item 13)

(e) ENVIRONMENT (A/58/25)

(h) INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN TAX MATTERS

The PRESIDENT said she took it that the Council wished to take note of the report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme on its twenty-second session (A/58/25).

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT said that, in accordance with Council resolution 1980/13, the Secretary-General reported to the Council on the progress of the work of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters following each of its meetings. Its 11th meeting, which had been due to take place at headquarters from 7 to 11 April 2003, had been rescheduled to be held in Geneva from 10 to 14 November 2003. Consequently, no action could be taken by the Council at its current substantive session.

CONSIDERATION OF THE REQUEST FOR CONVERSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE ORGANIZATION, AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION WITH OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, TO A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (agenda item 15) (E/2002/4)

The PRESIDENT recalled that the Council, at its 12th meeting of the resumed organizational session in New York on 24 June 2003, had decided to defer action on agenda item 15 to a later date. Consequently, no action was required at the Council's current session.

NEGOTIATION OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION TO CONSTITUTE IT AS A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (agenda item 16) (E/2003/60; E/C.1/2003/2; E/2003/L.19)

Draft resolution on an agreement between the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization (E/2003/L.19)

Mr. BALLAREZZO (Peru), Chairman of the Committee on Negotiations with Intergovernmental Agencies, introducing the draft resolution, said that, if adopted, it would welcome the World Tourism Organization into the United Nations family. In recognition of the significant economic and social impact of tourism, he hoped that, as well as adopting the draft resolution, the Council would hold a high-level dialogue on tourism in the course of one of its forthcoming sessions.

The PRESIDENT said she took it that the Council wished to adopt the draft resolution.

It was so decided.

Ms. SERWER (United States of America) said that her delegation had joined the consensus to adopt the draft resolution on the understanding that it would have no financial implications for the United Nations.

Ms. PIA (Andorra) and Mr. BENMELLOUK (Observer for Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the resolution and expressed the hope that the draft agreement would be approved by the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

Mr. CAVALLARI (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and the associated countries of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, welcomed the draft agreement negotiated with the World Tourism Organization (WTO). The Union had already cooperated with WTO on issues such as combating child sex tourism, democratization and respect for human rights and technical and statistical methods. Wisely developed, tourism had a significant role to play in sustainable development. As one of the most dynamic economic activities of the contemporary world, it had the potential to attract private investment, generate sustained growth in gross domestic product (GDP), create jobs and enhance

understanding between different cultures. Transforming WTO into a specialized agency would provide the United Nations system with a better understanding not only of the challenges facing the tourist industry, such as terrorism and communicable diseases, but also its potential for promoting development.

Mr. FRANGIALLI (Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (WTO)) expressed his appreciation of the Council's decision to adopt the draft resolution. As a result, the United Nations would shortly have a new specialized agency for the first time since 1985. From its beginnings as an elitist form of leisure practised by a few Europeans and North Americans in the nineteenth century, tourism had begun to take on some of its modern characteristics shortly after the First World War. The authorities had started to open up representation offices abroad, as well as local tourist information centres at home. The need for international cooperation had been recognized as early as 1934, with the establishment of an important non-governmental organization (NGO), known as the International Union of Official Tourist Propaganda Organizations.

After the Second World War, tourism had played a substantial role in the Marshall Plan, as European Governments realized its potential for promoting development. The International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO), the direct predecessor of WTO, was set up in 1947 with a view to broadening international cooperation. When tourism grew in magnitude during the 1960s, thanks to increased purchasing power and leisure time, combined with a reduction in the cost of transport, newly independent countries created specialized national administrations in an attempt to benefit from tourism exchanges. The United Nations declared 1967 the International Year of Tourism and, in 1969, the General Assembly recognized the vital contribution that international tourism was making to the economic, social, cultural and educational progress of mankind and to the safeguarding of world peace. IUOTO was called upon to play a more central role in the development of tourism. Consequently, it had made the transition to an intergovernmental organization in the 1970s, and became an agency related to the United Nations system.

For almost 30 years, WTO had been working with Governments and civil society actors in the rapidly evolving field of world tourism. Cooperation with the United Nations had grown ever closer. For instance, the General Assembly had recently given its support to a Global Code

of Ethics for Tourism and had declared 2002 the International Year of Ecotourism. At the internal level, WTO had entered into the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund in 1996, aligning its personnel regulations with those of the common system. The members of WTO were very satisfied with the new draft agreement in its current form, and stressed the need for close and constant coordination among the various organs and agencies of the United Nations system, under the supervision of the Economic and Social Council.

Tourism was characterized by its multidimensional nature. It was not only a major economic sector but also contributed to the protection of the environment, the preservation of biodiversity, the conservation of cultural heritage and enhanced understanding among nations.

While there would be no financial implications for the United Nations arising from the agreement, since WTO was entirely self-financing, the essential significance of the transformation lay in the increased visibility accorded to his organization. WTO was a small agency with a big mission. By virtue of the agreement, tourism would finally be considered on an equal footing with other major activities of human society, such as industry, agriculture, transport, education, culture, health and labour.

Mr. BENMELLOUK (Observer for Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the phenomenon of tourism had begun centuries before the period that the Secretary-General of WTO had mentioned in his remarks. Tourism had long been a global concept, not just the preserve of a few Europeans and North Americans.

Mr. HUSSEIN (Ethiopia) said that tourism, if wisely used, could be an important tool for promoting development, protecting the environment and the world's cultural heritage, and a vehicle for greater understanding between peoples. At the same time, nations should work together to ensure that terrorism did not inhibit the enjoyment of the tourists themselves or the development benefits that accrued to tourist destinations. Governments should therefore refrain from imposing travel bans on certain destinations, since security could never be fully and comprehensively guaranteed. The imposition of such measures was tantamount to caving in to the terrorists.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Guatemala) congratulated the Secretary-General of WTO on the organization's conversion into a specialized agency.

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) also congratulated the Secretary-General of WTO, commenting that his participation in the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) would surely enrich inter-agency cooperation.

Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: (agenda item 3) (continued)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE COUNCIL (continued) (E/2003/L.18)

Mr. ABOUTAHIR (Observer for Morocco), introducing the draft resolution on the World Solidarity Fund (E/2003/L.18) on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that it was intended to reaffirm prior decisions and also to introduce some new elements to help the Fund become operational. A number of key decisions had still to be implemented, but the importance of the Fund and its stated aim of eradicating poverty and hunger by 2015 should be universally recognized. The draft resolution reiterated the General Assembly's request to the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to establish, on an urgent basis, a high-level committee to draw up the Fund's strategy and offer guidance. The Secretary-General and the UNDP Administrator were also requested to take all necessary steps to promote and publicize the Fund, in partnership with the private sector and civil society. Developing countries were invited to identify specific projects that could be financed by the Fund. The question of the Fund's progress should be kept on the agenda of the Council and the General Assembly.

The PRESIDENT said that, in view of the spirit of consensus that had characterized the preparation of the draft resolution, he hoped that it would be adopted without any problems.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.